DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 479 CE 062 083

TITLE	The Promise of JOBS.
INSTITUTION	Business Council for Effective Literacy, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	Oct 92
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT	BCEL Newsletter for the Business & Literacy Communities; n33 p1,8-9 Oct 1992
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; Agency Cooperation; Case Studies; Economically Disadvantaged; Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; Financial Support; *Job Placement; *Job Training; National Surveys; Program Costs; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Implementation; State Federal Aid; *Welfare Recipients; Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	*Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program

ABSTRACT

About 2 years after enactment of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program, the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis began a 2-year study of how extensively JOBS was being implemented at the state level, in what manner, and with what results. The study included four elements: literature review, interviews and consultations with national experts in welfare and adult education policy, case studies in five states (Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Indiana, and Kansas), and a national mail survey of officials in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. According to the findings, programs were in place in most parts of the country, although they varied greatly in scope, method of operation, and financing. Important learning gains were being achieved for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) adults and their children. States gave a heavier emphasis to education than job placement. One of the most surprising findings was how strongly the states felt that the federal goal of bringing AFDC recipients to an 8.9 grade level was inadequate, primarily because all evidence indicates that this achievement level would still leave them either unemployable or employable at less than a living wage. States faced many problems at many levels, both operational and programmatic. The largest problems related to the lack or inadequacy of financing, goals, and coordination. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

BCEL BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY

ADULT LITERACY: PROGRAMS • PLANNING • ISSUES Newsletter For The Business & Literacy Communities

NO. 33 OCTOBER 1992

ED349479

THE PROMISE OF JOBS

The JOBS program was created under a major provision of the Family Support Act of 1988. It is one of the most complex human service systems that government has ever tried to implement in the United States. Its basic purpose is to help welfare recipients (approximately 5 million adults under Aid To Families with Dependent Children) move off welfare into self-sufficiency—through education, training, and employment. Because so many persons (parents) in the AFDC program have very limited basic skills, the JOBS program, with its central education and basic skills requirements, should be pursued by every means available.

The states have primary responsibility for implementing JOBS. Although the program has been fully operational for only about two years, they have made a commendable, even impressive, beginning. But they are working against disincentives and obstacles of all kinds—with federal policy itself the unintended source of many of the problems. If the problems are not remedied, the JOBS program, which holds such high promise, is likely to fail before it has been given a chance to succeed.

The JOBS basic education program is alive with people trying hard to succeed—administrators trying to make the program work and welfare recipients trying to find their way out of poverty. But these people are struggling to accomplish these goals within the confines of federal laws, rules, and regulations, and state and local realities, over which they have limited or no control. How much success they can achieve depends to a very great extent on the quality of the tools and guidance provided by government at every level.

These are some of the broad conclusions reached in The Promise Of JOBS, a new national research report just released by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis (SIPA). Highlights of the report are summarized and discussed in the following sections of this article.

(Cont'd on p. 8)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B Spangenberg

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE062083

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PROMISE OF JOBS

(Cont'd from p. 1)

The Framework For JOBS

The JOBS acronym stands for the "Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program." While basic skills training is a central and important component of the program, JOBS also embraces a variety of other welfare-to-work strands such as job readiness and job placement activities, work "supplementation" programs, community work experience programs, and the like.

Administrative responsibility for the JOBS program rests at the federal level with the Department of Health & Human Services. This means that state welfare departments have the frontline responsibility for determining who needs and is eligible for basic skills services at the state and local level, for making referrals to instructional programs, and for awarding service contracts to literacy and education provider groups. But because the experience of welfare agencies lies in administering income maintenance programs, not in designing and running educational programs, it also means that for JOBS basic education to operate at all (never mind issues of effectiveness) the active involvement and cooperation of other agencies and organizations is essential—state JTPA units, departments of education, literacy service groups, and usually others.

The Family Support Act provided a number of aids to help the states implement and operate JOBS and JOBS basic skills programs—e.g. allowing them to establish special JOBS case managers, requiring welfare departments to draw up "employability plans" for participants, and setting a floor on the number of welfare recipients states must enroll in their programs each year in order to receive federal funding (7% in 1990, growing to 20% in 1995). The Act also provides some guidance to the states on criteria to use in selecting AFDC recipients for participation in JOBS basic education. And it requires the states to provide child care, Medicaid coverage, and transportation services to the participants, along with other supporting services.

In general, federal funding for the overall JOBS program is provided through a combination of "capped entitlements" ($600 million for 1990 growing to $1.3 billion for 1995) and "uncapped entitlements" (designed specifically to assist with child care services). To receive funds from either stream, the states are required to provide non-federal matching funds (using a different formula for each stream) and to satisfy the federal program criteria.

SIPA's Study Approach & Purpose

About two years after enactment of JOBS, the Southport Institute began a two-year study of how extensively JOBS was being implemented at the state level, in what manner, and with what results. It sought to understand promising aspects of the collective effort, but also to identify any problems that stand in the way of developing the effective and comprehensive system of JOBS basic education envisioned by the framers of the Family Support Act. More to the point, it wished to determine, early enough to make a difference in the future outcome of JOBS, how closely the program's promise corresponds to the realities of its achievement, and whether and how the nation needs to adjust its present course to provide the environment needed for success.

SIPA's study had four interrelated elements:

- In late 1990, a literature review was conducted of the Family Support Act, state plans for implementing it, and related documents.
- In the spring of 1991, interviews and consultations were held with national experts in welfare and adult education policy, including those involved in their own studies of JOBS.
- In the summer and fall of 1991, in-depth case studies were carried out on how five states are implementing JOBS at the state and local levels. The states were *Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Indiana, and Kansas*—chosen for their geographical diversity, representation of rural and urban populations, and varied experience in offering welfare-to-work programs.
- From late 1991-1992, a national mail survey was conducted—of state officials in all 50 states and the District of Columbia—to determine the degree to which case-study data could be generalized.

In each of the five case-study states, using protocols developed by SIPA with input from outside advisors, interviews and focus group sessions were held with state-level representatives of adult education, employment and training, and welfare, and also with state legislators, the governor's staff, and various private sector groups. Interviews were also held with similar personnel at the local level. In addition, local focus group sessions were held with welfare recipients who are participating in JOBS basic education, and with frontline workers such as adult education teachers, JOBS case managers, and JTPA administrators. Interviews and focus group meetings were taped for subsequent analysis. In total, says SIPA, "project staff had contact with approximately one thousand individuals, and more than 350 hours of discussions were recorded." Finally, SIPA contracted various services from outside professionals—e.g. to gather and analyze state policy statements on JOBS.

The national survey response rate was more than 50 percent though some of the survey respondents simply reported that they did not have the information requested or were not involved in JOBS. SIPA indicates that its database of completed surveys "includes responses from 47 state welfare departments, 39 state adult education agencies, 37 state JTPA liaison offices, 17 state JOBS service agencies, and 31 other agencies and organizations, such as state departments of higher education, welfare advocates, state literacy programs, and governors' special boards, commissions, or offices on literacy."

The Main Study Conclusions

SIPA draws 11 overall conclusions about the status and future of JOBS and JOBS basic education. In slightly condensed form, here are the major ones.

- *Many—probably most—AFDC recipients want to work. The basic strategy of the JOBS program is to provide them with education, training, job placement and support services aimed at increasing their employability. This is a sound strategy, and arguably the only reasonable solution to the nation's welfare problem.*
- *Basic skills instruction plays a central role in the efforts of states to implement the JOBS program. More JOBS participants are enrolled in basic education than in any other JOBS activity at any given time. For a large percentage of welfare recipients, basic education is essential if they are to achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence from welfare.*
- *The JOBS program cannot possibly succeed without a strong basic education program.*
- *States have made a promising start in implementing JOBS basic education, and in some respects they have exceeded federal requirements. But their efforts fall short of providing the type of service JOBS participants need. Unless this situation is set right, JOBS basic education will fail.*
- *The major reason that JOBS basic education is deficient...is that states and federal government have been unwilling to face up to problems of inadequate funding systems, uncertain goals, and poor coordination. For the overall JOBS program to succeed, these problems will have to be corrected.*
- *The JOBS program has imposed heavy burdens on existing sources of adult education funding and service systems. Most of the funding for JOBS basic education comes from adult education budgets, rather than from the JOBS program.*
- *If the problems that impair the effectiveness of JOBS can be resolved, the path will be cleared for solving the problems of basic education in JOBS.*
- *It also must be recognized that neither JOBS, nor any other education and training program...can result in a very large percentage of welfare recipients becoming employed, or moving off welfare and out of poverty, until and unless the nation finds a way to create enough jobs that pay a living wage and to provide universal health care, affordable housing, and other basic necessities.*

What The States Have So Far Achieved

SIPA gives the states good marks for their initial efforts to implement JOBS basic education. Programs are in place in most parts of the country, although, as would be expected, they vary greatly in scope, method of operation, and financing. The instruction being provided is on a par with traditional adult education offerings, the best the states have to offer. And important learning gains are already being achieved for AFDC adults and, indirectly, their children. SIPA finds these achievements remarkable in light of the fact that JOBS is "a fairly small component of state welfare systems and its basic education component is a fairly small component of the nation's adult education effort." It is all the more remarkable in light of the disincentives and obstacles they must struggle to overcome (described below). Moreover, says SIPA, state and local officials show a consistently strong commitment to the importance of basic education within JOBS and a firm desire to see it succeed.

Due to the nature of the program, its infancy, and such problems as double counting, estimates of participation in different components of JOBS are far from precise. But, in general, the research shows that about 300,000 AFDC recipients across the nation are presently benefiting from at least one component of the JOBS program in any given month. About half this number, 150,000 adults, are enrolled in the basic skills program, "making basic education the single largest component of the JOBS program." In short, the states have made a conscious decision to give heavier emphasis to education than job placement, although that is not necessarily the federal intent. They have done so be-

3 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

cause they see this as the most important first step and the fundamentally greatest need. Moreover, it is significant to note that basic skills enrollees tend to remain in the program for much longer periods of time than those receiving other short-term benefits under JOBS, giving even greater importance to the overall weight of basic education.

In Arkansas—one state whose approach contains especially promising elements to help guide the national effort—a welfare official stressed the importance of basic education within JOBS this way: "We would have to say that basic education and training are the nuts and bolts of the program...basic education, training, child care, transportation: they have to be there or we don't have a program." He went on to say that, with the strong support of the governor, "our state decided to focus on the front end to build skills for jobs." In Connecticut "the goal of JOBS is to target participation in education first, and second to get jobs....Recidivism has shown us that simply getting a job [which may pay less than a living wage and be short-term in nature] is not the answer." These views were held by people in virtually every state involved in the JOBS program. In short, the states "have chosen a long-term strategy that relies heavily on basic education for helping welfare recipients to become employed, rather than a short-term job placement strategy."

One of SIPA's most surprising findings is how strongly the states feel that the federal goal of bringing AFDC recipients to an 8.9 grade-level is inadequate, primarily because all the evidence indicates that this achievement level will still leave them either unemployable or employable at less than a living wage. Despite huge constraints, says SIPA, most states are thus trying to move toward a higher level of education service, over a longer period of time. Acquisition of a GED is the most common goal in use.

Problems In State Practice

While SIPA finds the achievements and attitudes of the states to be both encouraging and impressive—and to hold the seeds for success—this judgment is relative. In fact, it turns out that what is most astonishing is that the states have gone as far as they have largely out of sheer commitment and determination.

The problems they face are many and exist at many levels. They are both operational and programmatic. Few are simple. At one level, for example, they range from basic issues of program suitability and effectiveness...to inappropriate standards for testing and selecting program participants...to lack of solid measures for judging participant outcomes...to an almost complete lack of systematic and comparable data gathering...to wide variations in goals among the participating organizations.

On another level are an array of day-to-day administrative problems. For instance, the "employment plans" drawn up by welfare departments tend to include limited information that could inform education service groups (when shared with them) about individual needs and goals. Similarly, the results of welfare agency skills testing are commonly not shared with their education partners to the effort. Thus the AFDC participants are being needlessly subjected to double testing, to say nothing of the related costs that this duplication entails. Furthermore, hardly anyone is clear about what they should be testing for.

On still another level, the resources of education provider groups are very limited and inadequate to the new demand. As a consequence, potential JOBS participants, already tested and in the pipeline for basic skills education, are being placed on waiting lists, often for lengthy periods of time. On the point of strained financial resources, a related (and unintended) consequence is the growing probability that education and literacy organizations will be able to accommodate JOBS students only by cutting back their service to traditional basic education students, effectively putting the two client groups in direct competition.

These and many other problems of state practice are troublesome and formidable enough. But they are not, at this stage, the major, first-priority problems—which stem in large part from specific provisions in the federal JOBS legislation.

Finance, Goals, & Coordination: The Major Problems

The largest problems of all relate in one way or another to the issues of finance, goals, and coordination—or more precisely the lack or inadequacy of these things.

Item. *In general, less than 20% of the costs of providing basic education to JOBS participants comes from federal JOBS funding. JOBS basic education services are thus far from burdensome to the federal JOBS program, although JOBS is federally-mandated.*

Although basic education has become the largest single component of the program and is judged to be essential to the program's success, federal dollars that are provided for JOBS are used almost entirely for program administration, case management, and support services.

In the case-study states, California is the leader in supporting JOBS basic education—but federal JOBS funding covered only 22% of its costs in 1991. Arkansas has provided the second highest level of support for JOBS basic education, with 18% covered by the federal government in 1991. But in 1992, the federal percentage was reduced to zero, with the state paying the total tab. (Note that Arkansas is one of only a few states where general adult education budgets are growing rapidly.) New Hampshire, which enrolls fewer than 400 JOBS participants in basic education, gets 75% of its funding from JOBS, while New York, with 20,000 participants, covers about 45% of its costs from JOBS. The New Hampshire and New York circumstances are atypical, however, with most states receiving little or no federal funds to help with the costs of their JOBS basic education services.

Item. *JOBS requires that AFDC participants take part in its activities for at least 20 hours a week on average—many times the number of instructional hours that traditional adult basic education students attend classes or use related services.* The cost implications of this 20-hour rule are obvious, quite apart from its tendency to "crowd out" the traditional students. The rule also increases the likelihood that AFDC students will be referred to program activities that are inappropriate and that will not lead to self-sufficiency. The 20-hour rule, says SIPA, "is at best irrelevant and at worst a distraction that invites nominal compliance."

Item. *For lack of clearly articulated and realistic goals and guidelines in federal law, state officials have had to operate in a vacuum.* Not surprisingly, the goals they have adopted vary greatly from state to state and even among jurisdictions within each state. Not only is this a major source of confusion but it prevents any useful comparative judgments about outcomes. More to the point, the goals that are being adopted will not necessarily produce self-sufficiency through work, and the states, to their credit, seem to realize this.

As noted earlier, the most common state goal adopted for JOBS basic skills participants is getting a GED. But SIPA's findings indicate that this goal is chosen basically because it is one everybody understands, not because it is adequate for guiding basic education services for AFDC recipients. For one thing, only a small percentage of the basic education participants have attained a GED or are expected to. But the larger issue is the same as in adult basic education generally—at what level of competence should individuals be able to function to perform well in their jobs, to be self-sufficient, and to have a foundation for future growth? Federal JOBS regulations are virtually silent on this issue—and concrete guidelines are needed at the federal level to provide the states with the tools they need. The place to start, says SIPA, is to provide direction that will move the states away from the "one size fits all" mentality of most instruction—keeping in mind that the the bottom-line goal of JOBS is employment at a living wage. Adult education programs for AFDC students need to be customized and to take a functional context approach. Fortunately, there is a growing experience in the nation in both of these approaches that can be built upon if states are given the incentives and tools to do so. One federal step that would help immeasurably toward this goal is to require that the states adopt as their operating definition of literacy the one contained in the National Literacy Act: *An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.*

Item. *There is virtually no meaningful coordination among state and local welfare agencies, departments of education, other training organizations, and education service providers.* This not only hampers every aspect of the JOBS programs already, but it seriously restricts the quality and reliability of information available at the state level for future planning and funding purposes, and between state and federal officials. Here, again, precise guidelines are needed and presently lacking in the federal JOBS legislation.

A Final Note

Owing to space constraints, the above discussion is necessarily offered in abbreviated form. SIPA's report in fact provides a far deeper and wider analylsis of these and many other issues, and it should be read in its entirety. It should be noted, too, that while SIPA's findings paint a picture both bleak and hopeful, SIPA does believe the problems can be solved. Its report offers numerous short- and long-term recommendations for government at all levels, and for other parties to the JOBS enterprise.

(The Promise of JOBS is $17.95 prepaid from the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, 820 First Street NE, Suite 460, Washington, DC 20002, 202-682-4100. A related publication, "It's Not Like They Say": Welfare Recipients Talk About Welfare, Work and Education, is also available for $20. Both publications, if ordered together, are $30.)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE